Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

INDEX

MILK FEVER PREVENTION IN BEEF COWS TO BE EXPLORED 06-28-113

SASKATCHEWAN FOREST CENTRE FIELD DAYS COMING UP 06-28-114

SITE SELECTION IS CRUCIAL TO AN INTENSIVE LIVESTOCK OPERATION'S PROFITABILITY 06-28-115

STUDY ON DISEASE MANAGEMENT FOR MEXICAN BOUND SEED POTATOES 06-28-116

ROYAL RED ARABIAN HORSE SHOW A REAL BENEFIT FOR THE SASKATCHEWAN ECONOMY 06-28-117

FARM AND FOOD REPORT WILL BE SUSPENDED FOR THE WEEKS OF JULY 17TH AND 24TH AND WILL RESUME JULY 31ST.

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Log Number: 06-28-113
Week of July 10, 2006

MILK FEVER PREVENTION IN BEEF COWS TO BE EXPLORED

Scientists at the Department of Animal and Poultry Sciences of the University of Saskatchewan will be able to take a nutritional look at the prevention of milk fever in beef cows, thanks to funding from Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food's (SAF) Agriculture Development Fund.

John McKinnon of the Department of Animal and Poultry Sciences at the University will direct the project.

"This project is based on a Saskatchewan Beef Development Fund project that we carried out in 2002 and 2003. In the North Battleford area during the 2002 calving season, there was a wide incidence of tetany-like symptoms, such as nervousness and muscle twitching, among cattle. They would stagger, and become paralyzed and even comatose. Some were dying.

"We were trying to decide whether we were dealing with milk fever or with another condition called tetany. These are both disruptions in the electrolyte balance in the animal. A lot of the herds experiencing these symptoms had been fed on cereal silage and barley or oat greenfeed.

McKinnon and his team worked with SAF Livestock Development Specialist Bryan Doig and Dr. Tom Schmidt of Lakeland Veterinary Services to conduct a survey of what was fed to the animals. After examining the symptoms and analyzing blood samples, they concluded they were dealing with milk fever.

"We concluded that the problem was caused by the high potassium content in the greenfeed that had been fed to these cows, which led to an imbalance of electrolytes," says McKinnon. The problem has now been identified in cattle herds across Western Canada.

McKinnon explains that scientists look at the Dietary Cation Anion Balance (DCAB) ratio to evaluate blood electrolytes. This compares the ratio of cations to anions in the diet, and, in particular, the ratio of sodium and potassium to chloride and sulphate. Pregnant dairy cows with a DCAB ratio very close to zero or slightly negative will have few problems with milk fever; the beef cattle MacKinnon studied had DCAB ratios of nearly 450.

(more)

"We believe that it was the potassium content in the greenfeed that caused this high DCAB ratio, which eventually led to milk fever. There is very little research on beef cattle, so the intent of our current research is to try to define the actual DCAB ratio that is needed to minimize milk fever in beef cows approaching calving."

- 30 -

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SASKATCHEWAN FOREST CENTRE FIELD DAYS COMING UP

If you have been considering producing trees on your farm, the Saskatchewan Forest Centre has scheduled three field days during the month of July that you might find useful to attend.

These events will include discussions on the establishment and management of tree plantations on farms, vegetation and weed management, pruning hybrid poplar, hybrid poplar clonal trials and silvopasture (tree farming) management, explains Larry White, an Agro-forestry Specialist with the Centre.

"On the morning of July 13, we are touring Vern Anderson's hybrid poplar planting at Rose Valley to look at his three-year-old hybrid poplars. In the afternoon, we will be going to Zosel's Tree Farm at Pleasantdale to look at the hybrid poplar clonal trial. As well, we are going to Bill Sullivan's silvopasture project at Pleasantdale. The last stop in the afternoon will be at Bruce LeBarre's at Pleasantdale to look at a hybrid poplar and larch planting that he did three years ago."

White says anybody considering silvopasture would find it well be worth their while to come out for the day.

A second field day, on July 20, will go to Craik's Eco-Centre, where there is a forest 20/20 demonstration plantation that was planted in 2004, and, in the afternoon, to Neil Kettilson's site at Blackstrap Lake.

There are interesting hybrid poplar plantings worthy of a visit there, according to White: "We want to see how it is done; talk about weed control and other issues; different clones, planting and maintenance of hybrid poplar sites."

The third field day, on July 25, will take participants to Meadow Lake.

"We will be taking a look again at hybrid poplar clones; at some fertility work that is being done there and at weed control. The Meadow Lake planting is approaching nine years old now, so they are getting some reasonably mature trees. This is a chance to see some older plantings of hybrid poplars."

White believes these field days are a good opportunity for people to get out and meet some of the specialists in the industry.

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"There will be representatives of the University of Saskatchewan and the PFRA Shelterbelt Centre at Indian Head, as well as the farmers who have participated in the projects. It is an opportunity to talk to a few people in the know and to see what some of these plantings look like, as well as to gauge the viability of the silvopasture option. There is always the question: 'can I make money doing this?'"

White reports that there has been lots of interest from landowners in the last couple of years in returning some of their cleared land back to some permanent cover, either grass or trees.

"People often say to us: 'They are closing down pulp mills and you guys are promoting growing trees.' But there are other opportunities in wood products, whether it is engineered wood products or the opportunities here for using tree biomass for energy production in the future. There are a lot more uses for tree biomass than just pulp."

- 30 -

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SITE SELECTION IS CRUCIAL TO AN INTENSIVE LIVESTOCK OPERATION'S PROFITABILITY

Site selection is a key component to keep in mind when assessing profitability for an intensive livestock operation (ILO) project, according to Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) Agri-Business Development Intern Tanner Bradley.

"Groups considering ILOs are usually tempted first to go out and buy the land, and then they start the planning phase, but what SAF is trying to emphasize with them is the importance and impact that site selection will have on the profitability of that feedlot. By ensuring that you do the proper planning beforehand, we will help ensure that there are no unpleasant surprises as you get to the construction phase and then the operations phase."

The site chosen will have a direct impact on both initial capital costs and variable costs once the ILO becomes operational, says Bradley.

"The feeding industry is a low-margin business; therefore, minimizing all costs is important for an ILO to remain viable. Careful planning needs to take place before the land is purchased or construction begins."

First of all, the selected site must meet requirements for the ILO permitting process. Mitigating the risk of ground water contamination is a major component of the ILO approval process. Certain soil types increase the contamination risk. Less desirable soil conditions will result in increased site engineering and construction costs. There may also be limitations on the potential capacity of the ILO which could affect possible expansion plans. Topographic maps will provide good preliminary site information, and can be accessed free-of-charge through the Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Agriculture Operations Branch.

Water access in another issue to consider, Bradley points out.

"There must be sufficient water to meet the requirements of the ILO. Piping in water from another location is another added cost that could be avoided. The Saskatchewan Watershed Authority should be contacted to get initial information on the site."

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In addition, site selection will also have a direct impact on the variable costs—the reoccurring costs—of an operation. For example, locating the site near a primary highway rather than a secondary highway will reduce transportation costs. Being located on a primary highway means larger loads can be sent and received.

"The result is a lower per unit cost for transportation. Each rural municipality (RM) has different rules on the weight restrictions on their roads; therefore the RM should be consulted.

"Another factor that will affect an ILO is the manure removal costs. Having a land base on which to spread the manure within close proximity to the ILO is important to minimize manure removal costs. It is also important to be able apply the manure on the land which is the greatest benefit to the shareholders."

Careful planning prior to "putting the shovel in the ground" will increase the profitability potential of an ILO, Bradley points out. The examples discussed here are just some of the factors that must be considered prior to selecting an appropriate site for an ILO development. There are many organizations that should be consulted.

"Initial contact with your local SAF livestock development specialist can help streamline the process during the initial planning phase. Most initial information can be provided to the proponent for little or no cost, and the information is readily available. By working closely with your livestock development specialist, this information can be gathered and analysed in a few weeks."

The resulting analysis can help to ensure lower per-unit costs once the ILO is operational, and will minimize unwanted surprises during the construction phase.

- 30 -

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STUDY ON DISEASE MANAGEMENT FOR MEXICAN BOUND SEED POTATOES

It is partly about the customer always being right. A research project at the University of Saskatchewan, funded by the Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food's (SAF) Agriculture Development Fund, is looking to ensure Saskatchewan-grown seed potatoes are always welcome in countries like Mexico.

"Saskatchewan has a well-deserved reputation for producing some of the best seed potatoes anywhere," says Doug Waterer of the Department of Plant Sciences at the University of Saskatchewan, who, along with Jill Thompson, is conducting the project. "The growers have been very successful in terms of expanding their markets, so Saskatchewan is supplying seed potatoes basically right across Canada. We have been very successful in moving product into the United States as well, and Saskatchewan is recognized as having excellent seed potatoes by American growers. But we are looking at other horizons. Mexico has a large potato industry.

"They are very interested in high-quality seed, but they have extremely stringent disease standards. And you can appreciate that, if you are sending a load of seed all the way down to Mexico, you want to avoid even the slightest possibility that it will not be accepted by the buyer down there."

Therefore, Waterer's team is working in conjunction with the Saskatchewan Seed Potato Growers Association to make absolutely sure they are using the best possible techniques to meet the extremely stringent disease standards of Mexico.

"We are using an integrated approach, combining factors such as land selection, crop management, the use of appropriate pesticides and, in some cases, the development of new pesticides. We look at handling practices, grading practices and shipping procedures. In some cases, we are looking to test and support the registration of new pesticides. That is what makes it an integrated project.

"We are working with the seed growers, but also in conjunction with the grade standards folks at the Canadian Food Inspection Agency in Canada, and their counterparts in Mexico."

As Waterer puts it: "there is no sense in us doing something if our Mexican friends don't agree with us. 'The customer is always right' is all it boils down to."

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The University of Saskatchewan scientist is also pleased with the level of collaboration his team enjoys from the Saskatchewan Seed Potato Growers Association.

"We will be working very actively with the growers because they are really the experts as to what the customers want," he concludes.

One of the very significant advantages that Saskatchewan has in seed production is that the seed farms are very isolated, which hinders the spread of disease.

"Our relatively short, cool and dry growing season, and our long, rigorous winters tend to reduce disease pressures."

- 30 -

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ROYAL RED ARABIAN HORSE SHOW A REAL BENEFIT FOR THE SASKATCHEWAN ECONOMY

Regina will once again be turned into the Arabian horse capital of Canada, when the 49th Canadian National Arabian and Half-Arabian Championship Horse Show comes to town from August 21 to 26, 2006.

Affectionately known as "The Royal Red," this week-long event is remarkable not just because it features top-level horse show competition and a commercial trade fair that draws more than 25,000 spectators and brings in approximately 1,000 horses from Canada and the United States. It is remarkable for the unparalleled international exposure it gives the Saskatchewan horse industry.

This is why Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food financially supports the show, according to Director of Livestock Development Greg Haase.

"It attracts people and horses from all over North America. This is viewed as one of the most important livestock events to come to our province. It is international in scope. It is our way of participating or supporting that. It showcases the top end of the Arabian breed."

"The Royal Red does a ton of things for Saskatchewan," says Bill Hutchinson, the chair of the Royal Red Host Committee. "First of all, we shouldn't forget the economic contribution. It contributes roughly $10 million to the provincial economy each year. If we are successful in securing another five-year contract, that is another $50 million or so into the local and district economy. So it is tremendously powerful from that perspective. But it does a lot more.

"One of the things that I am happiest about is that it puts Saskatchewan, in general, and Regina, in particular, on the world map. This truly is an international-calibre competition; the finest of its kind in the country and it is one of the top handfuls of Arabian horse shows on this continent. The best horses in the world compete here each and every year."

Hutchinson says the vast majority of Americans who exhibit and who come to ride and to do the horse-training and -handling are new visitors to the province who might not come here otherwise.

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"It is also a great source of pride for the equine industry in Regina and all over southern Saskatchewan. Every year we have Saskatchewan owners showing and riding their own horses. In fact, a couple of years ago, there was a real Cinderella story... absolutely marvellous. A youngster from Maple Creek in the Junior Amateur Owner-To-Ride Class, who competed with her own horse that she bought, trained and rode in the show, won a National Championship against competition from all over North America. It was fabulous! What a great story!"

During the show, the barns take on the flamboyant colours of stables from around North America. Banners unfurl, benches and plants are artfully displayed in a symphony of landscape productions intended to celebrate the oldest known breed of riding horse.

The people who own such noble animals take great pride in their relationships with them. They will spare no expense. Inside the barns and outside, sod is brought in; lumber is purchased to build walls and partitions; furniture is rented; light fixtures are installed, and soon, a horse- and people-friendly indoor environment emerges. People set up luxury dining rooms, living rooms with television sets, playpens for children. Within metres, a rider puts bandages on the feet of his horse; another adjusts her breeches and boots, while yet another climbs on her mount and heads to the ring.

"Royal Red City" is not only an amazing display of grace and elegance: it is a temporary settlement with distinct rules of behaviours. The golf cart becomes the vehicle-of-choice to shuttle among barns, show rings and RVs.

"Royal Red City" comes with various amenities. Vendors of straw, hay and wood shavings are conveniently located on site. A sheltered sitting area is established and daily newspaper dispensing boxes are brought in to occupy the more leisurely moments of these honoured guests on the grounds.

"It is real joy for us local folks to walk around the grounds and ask these passionate horse people what they think of Regina," says Hutchinson "Why do they like coming back here? Their answers are: "people are extremely friendly everywhere"... "we go to a restaurant and people are very polite"... "when the show is hosted in other cities, sometimes nobody watches us in the ring. Here they cheer for us".

No wonder they keep coming back.

- 30 -

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